STORM DRAINS INSPECTED



Delaware State News/Dave Chambers

KCI Technologies Inc.'s Matthew Ortynsky of Middletown places notices on doorknobs alerting residents that someone has polluted the neighborhood storm drain with hazardous chemicals. The Delaware Department of Transportation has begun an inspection of all storm drains in Kent and Sussex counties.

Clearer picture of water sought

By George Mast Delaware State News

DOVER — Rainwater washing over Downstate yards and developments makes its way into roadside ditches and curbside storm drains and ultimately finds itself emptied out into streams, lakes or the Atlantic Ocean.

The Delaware Department of Transportation is in the process of expanding the state-wide inspection of all its storm drains, swales and ditches in Kent and Sussex counties to ensure that runoff water makes it to its final destination with as few contaminants as possible.

"Stormwater is known to carry pollutants," said Randy Cole, environmental program manager for DelDOT. "As it travels across the land it picks up everything in its path, from bacteria in dog waste, to oil dripping from cars to pesticides sprayed on yards.

"The message is, everything you do in your lawn, even though you don't live next to a pond or stream, is eventually going to find its way into a watershed."

Under the federal Clean Water Act of 1972, DelDOT was required to begin operating the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System program in New Castle County in 2001 in order to improve the quality of stormwater runoff.



KCl's Josh Oburn, of Newark, measures a storm drain. The insignia affixed to the curb indicates that only stormwater goes down that drain.

While much of the Downstate stormwater system was not required to be inspected, because of lower population rates, Mr. Cole said the department began inspecting the Kent County area in 2007 as well.

"We think it's important because of maintenance and pollution tracking," he said.

DelDOT has hired professional consulting firms KCI Technologies Inc. and Century Engineering to inventory and

inspect its storm drainage system statewide under the \$3.5 million program.

While around 90 percent of New Castle County has already undergone an initial inspection, much of Kent County and all of Sussex remains. Of the 182 subdivisions currently in Kent County, the department has overseen inspection of 65. In Sussex County there are 225

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From left, KCI Technologies Inc.'s Josh Oburn of Newark uses a camera to inspect a storm drain Thursday while DelDOT's environmental program manager Randy Cole, of Magnolia, and KCl's Matthew Ortynsky, of Middletown, check the data in a development west of Cheswold.

Water

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subdivisions, of which none have been inspected.

Armed with a camera mounted onto a telescoping pole hooked to a wireless laptop com-puter, members of KCI Technologies field team can peer underground into dark storm drains to check for contaminants, illegally dumped garbage, yard clippings and cracks in the pipe.

With the help of a Global Positioning System device, footage from the camera and the basics on each storm drain is stored in an electronic database to form a map of the entire system.

Mr. Cole said the information is invaluable for the department's maintenance and water quality departments in monitoring the stormwater system.

"It's kind of a double-edged sword," he said.

Mr. Thompson said his crews have found everything from deposits of kitchen grease, to paint, to motor oil in the drains.

If contaminants are found, a door hanger is placed on houses in the surrounding neighborhood alerting residents to the material found in the drain.

If a problem persists, the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control is notified and fines over \$1,000 could be levied, Mr. Cole said.

Mr. Thompson said his crews also perform dry-weather inspections of the drains to see if any nearby residents have illegally hooked a washing ma-

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chine or sump pump into the state's storm drain pipeline. A simple water check determines if there are, in fact, soap suds in the water or if it is simply ground

Marianne Walch, an environmental scientist with the department, said most people simply don't realize the part their property plays in contaminating a whole body of water.

"Some people just aren't aware that dumping is wrong and that it will impact the stream," she said.

Brochures handed by teams inspecting the storm drains encourage residents to take proactive steps to reducing their own contamination of runoff water by servicing vehicles regularly to prevent leaks; fertilizing yards lightly and never before a rainstorm; washing cars at a car wash or on the grass instead of a paved surface, to prevent runoff into storm drains; picking up waste from pets; and placing trash in proper receptacles.

Anyone who sees a storm drain that needs to be repaired can notify DelDOT at (800) 652-5600 and anyone who notices illegal dumping can notify Del-DOT by calling (800) 662-8802.

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